

Doctrine Into Life, Pt. 3 **Doctrine as Identifying with Christ**

2:45 PM Monday, January 11, 2011

A. Living by a Story: Living by *the* Story of the one true Lord

If doctrine, the rule of faith, comprises the essential “bones” of the gospel story, then doctrine is supremely practical, for it carries the new narrative of God’s coming to us in Christ, the one narrative with the power to re-write our old stories and change our personal lives, our use of energy and resources, our relationship to the world.

Jason Stellman, *Dual Citizens*

Moreover, the gathering of the church for worship re-contextualizes and reorients the pilgrim people of God as He addresses, undresses, and then re-dresses those whom He has cast in supporting roles in His redemptive drama. (31)

Our very existence as God’s pilgrim people is constituted by a covenant, a narrative, a story about a crucified and risen God who undid the curse and broke the spell that we allowed the serpent to cast on us. (36-7).

As the re-constituted people of God, believers can go out from the worship service into the world knowing that, when all is said and done, the shallow and earthly narrative that vies for their allegiance is altogether unworthy to be compared with the epic tale that God is spinning, a story they have been swept up into. (37)

It is God who provides us our narrative and tells us our story, for it is His story, the history of redemption, the divine drama according to which man was made and then lost, found and then remade in the image of a second Adam, whose faithful obedience insures our acceptance by God and whose glorious resurrection guarantees our own. (176)

B. Union with Christ: The Heartbeat of Doctrine into Life

At the hinge of the *Institutes*, Calvin makes the turn from consideration of the Redeemer to how we participate in him, i.e. from doctrine to life.

We must now examine this question. How do we receive those benefits which the Father bestowed on his only-begotten Son — not for Christ's own private use, but that he might enrich poor and needy men? First, we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and to dwell within us....

It is true that we obtain this by faith. Yet since we see that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel, reason itself teaches us to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit, by which we come to enjoy Christ and all his benefits
(Institutes 3.1.1)

Doctrine of Reconciliation is based on the actions of Christ and our inclusion in those actions when we are joined to Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit through faith. He lived the life of fidelity and love for Father and others, required of us which we cannot live—his active obedience. He went through the consequences our sins deserved so that we might not have to when joined to him—his passive obedience. He triumphed over the powers of sin and death so that in him we might triumph.

We are saved in Christ, given what he has accomplished, what he has in himself and through his mighty works that we can never have in ourselves but only in relationship to him.

Thus, Christology, knowing Christ, is of the utmost practical importance to our people and ministry. For life is not how I can live the life I've chosen for myself with an accent of spirituality from Jesus, some help getting me back on course in time of need. It's about how I can be joined to him and so live with his life flowing through me, directing, shaping.

C. Key Passages

2 Corinthians 5: 14-21

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Note the actions of Christ and the results in the lives of those joined to him. We are dead to sin, but alive to God as Paul says in Romans 6. He died for us, we also died with him. So our lives receive a new orientation.

What we know, theologically of Jesus, affects how we live

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5: 14-21)

Note the ministry of those joined to Jesus is shaped by God's past and present ministry in Jesus: reconciling the world to himself and urging people to be reconciled to him.

We become the righteousness of God in him, in him, in him.

2) Ephesians 1: 3-10

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us **in Christ** with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he **chose us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. **In love** he predestined us for adoption as

sons through Jesus Christ, [to, into, himself] according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has **blessed us in the Beloved**. **In him** we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his **purpose**, which he set forth **in Christ** as a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.

In this rich passage, on which we may only touch, note 2 key things:

1) The story of Jesus: a) beginning in eternity, b) passing through this world and summed up in the shedding of his blood, c) heading toward fulfillment of a future plan in which Christ unites all things.

2) The use of **pronouns**, locating us in the story of Jesus, the purposes and love of God.

Mystical identification. Predestination in terms not of abstract doctrine but concrete actions.

3. Romans 6:1-11 (ESV)

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized **into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death?

We were buried therefore **with him** by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, **we too** might walk in newness of life. For if we have been **united with him in a death** like his, we shall certainly be **united with him in a resurrection** like his.

We know that **our old self was crucified with him** in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we have **died with Christ**, we believe that we will also **live with him**. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Practical, daily affect of being joined to his death and resurrection?

Miles Stanford, *Principles of Spiritual Growth*.

4. John 14-17

John 14:19-20

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

John 15:5 (ESV)

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

John 17:22-23 (ESV)

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

D. Calvin on Union with Christ

1) So I turn this argument of theirs back against them: if you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation. But since Christ has been so imparted to you with all his benefits that all his things are made yours, that you are made a member of him, indeed one with him, his righteousness overwhelms your sins; his salvation wipes out your condemnation; with his worthiness he intercedes that your unworthiness may not come before God's sight. Surely this is so: We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or ourselves from him. Rather we ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us. So the apostle teaches us: "Now your body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit of Christ which dwells in you is life because of righteousness"...And to confirm this he uses the same reason I have brought forward: that Christ is not outside us but dwells within us. Not only does he cleave to us by an indivisible bond of fellowship, but with a wonderful communion, as day by day, he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us. (*Institutes*, 3.2.24)

Highlight:

- all his things are made yours, you are one with him.

- The effect he has in joining himself to us: Like a game of “war”
 - His righteousness overwhelms our sins
 - His salvation wipes out our condemnation
 - His worthiness takes away unworthiness
- Hold fast bravely with both hands (Jacob) to that fellowship
- Christ not outside us, but dwells in us.
- He cleaves to us, wonderful communion, day by day

2) Calvin on Mystical Union

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF OUR UNION WITH CHRIST?

Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short, because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have a fellowship of righteousness with him. (3.11.10).

Highlight:

- Yes, there is a righteousness that is imputed to us, alien to us and credited to us, not infused. But that does not negate the union. He makes us sharers with him.

Calvin also focused on union with Christ as essential to justification. What we receive from God by grace is the indwelling of Christ himself into whose risen life we are incorporated. As McGrath says, “justification is still treated as the external pronouncement of God that we are right in his sight – but the pronouncement is made on the basis of the presence within us of the living Christ” (McGrath, *Justification by Faith*, 58).

3) The Wonderful Exchange

Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from this Sacrament; in it they have a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of Heaven, into which

he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him; again, that we cannot be condemned for our sins, from whose guilt he has absolved us, since he willed to take them upon himself as if they were his own. This is the *wonderful exchange* which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness. (*Institutes* 4.17.2) .

4) Participation through the Supper

Now, even though all these things have to do with faith, I leave no place for the sophistry that what I mean when I say Christ is received by faith is that he is received only by understanding and imagination. For the promises offer him, not for us to halt in the appearance and bare knowledge alone, but to enjoy true participation in him. And indeed, I do not see how anyone can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a *true participation* in Christ himself. For those benefits would not come to us unless Christ first made himself ours.

I say, therefore, that in the mystery of the Supper, Christ is truly shown to us through the symbols of bread and wine, his very body and blood, in which he has fulfilled all obedience to obtain righteousness for us. Why? First, that we may grow into one body with him; secondly, having been made partakers of his substance, that we may also feel his power in partaking of all his benefits. (4.17.11)

The Lord bestows this benefit upon us through his Spirit so that we may be made one in body, spirit, and soul with him. The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us. (4.17.12)

Highlight: The Spirit is the bond of union, the conveyancer, bringing all the benefits. This occurs in the Supper, once and for all, more and more.